

LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
**BULLETIN 27**

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**RECRUITING -  
II. THE RIGHT PERSON  
FOR THE JOB**

**Ontario Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs**

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To the Municipal Clerk:

Please circulate this bulletin or make copies for distribution to councillors or staff of your municipality who may be interested in the subject. Additional copies are available at fifty cents each from the Publications Centre (see page 9).

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## Introduction

In a previous bulletin on recruiting, the planning of the hiring process was discussed -- the steps in the process, who might be involved in addition to the position's immediate superior, the alternative ways that council might go about hiring those who report directly to it. The bulletin also suggested that you might try to predict vacancies as often as possible to try to make up for some of the time that hiring takes.

This bulletin will centre on the job that you're trying to fill and how you should examine it before you write the ad.

Too often jobs are filled automatically with the job title being the only point of reference -- "We'll need a new Clerk-Treasurer when George retires," or "What we need to solve our problems is a C.A.O." However, the duties of jobs with the same title can be quite different. The way similar jobs are done varies even more. And both of these differences will demand different types of people with different skills and approaches.

This bulletin suggests ways of going about the task of deciding, as specifically as possible, the type of person to look for when filling a job.

### What Do You Want the Person to Do? - The Job

Most of us have bought at least one car in our lives and seem to find it quite natural to decide, before even setting foot in a showroom, what kind of car we're looking for. How much can we afford to pay? What will the car be used for -- city driving, long trips, hauling a trailer? How important are such performance features as fuel consumption, repair frequency?

Deciding what type of staff a municipality needs seems not to be such a different process, but somehow it does not come so naturally.

Just as it is not enough to say "We need a new car," neither is it enough to say "We need more staff." You have to decide what the need is before you go looking for someone.

If yours is a small municipality, that step is important. In large municipalities, jobs tend to be specialized; in small municipalities, workload does not fall so neatly into compartments and jobs usually have more variety. For example, cities will employ people who just maintain files, whereas a small town will have that function performed as only a part of a bigger job. Smaller municipalities, then, should probably place more emphasis on the question of what a new staff member should do; the variety of skills that will be needed should be pin-pointed long before the ad is written.

Before filling any job, whether it is senior or junior, whether it is an addition or has been filled before, you should know the answers to these questions:

- Who will this position report to?
- What is its main purpose?
- What has to be done to achieve that purpose?  
In other words, what are the tasks of the job?
- What special skills, training, education would a person have to have to perform those tasks?
- Does the person need any prior experience?  
If so, what kind? Experience in another office, a plant, another municipality?

- What personal qualities should the person possess? (If the job involves outside manual work or other special working conditions, the needed personal qualities will centre on the physical. If the job involves managing or supervising or working closely with other staff or council members, the desirable personal qualities will be more personality oriented.)
- What salary range should be offered for the job? What is being paid for similar work in other municipalities the size of yours? What is being paid for similar work in the community? How does the job compare in difficulty to others within the municipal organization?

If you answer these questions and make a few notes to yourself, you should end up with a "mini" job description, a salary range, and a list of "must have's" and "nice to have's". For example, you may have determined that workload will be relieved and efficiency increased if you hire a typist-receptionist. The job description, or task list, will indicate the kinds of letters, reports, and forms that will be typed and, therefore, the degree of typing skill that will be required. One "must have" will, of course, be proven typing ability. Experience may not be necessary; it would be "nice to have" but you won't demand it. Another "nice to have" would be an attractive physical appearance, but you would not sacrifice typing skills for it. (Remember that your "nice to have's" cannot show preferences for males or females, nor discriminate as to age, race or religion.)

#### Who Are You Looking For? - The Person

Thinking in terms of "must have's" and "nice to have's" is one way of developing a profile of the person you are looking for. A profile describes the skills, the types of experience and the level of education you will be looking for in applicants. The profile establishes a set of criteria for deciding

- which applicants you will interview, and why;
- the wording of the ad and where it will be placed;

- the types of questions that will be asked in interviews;
- the minimum standards that you will accept for filling the job.

Profiles are much easier to develop for jobs where manual or technical skills are most important. For jobs like typist, draftsman, bookkeeper, mechanic, file clerk, librarian, planning technician, the "must have's" will be the ability to perform certain functions that have been displayed and proven in previous work. The "nice to have's" narrow down to personality factors.

For management jobs, establishing a profile is more difficult. You have to recognize the various aspects of these more complex jobs. You also have to see the job as it relates to other jobs and other people in the organization. The personality factors play a very important role and will affect the role of the job itself.

It might be helpful to think of management jobs and the type of person you're looking for in the following terms:

technical skills  
management skills  
communicative ability  
mental energy  
political awareness.

The next few pages will enlarge on these five factors, each of which is present to some degree in all municipal management jobs.

Technical Skills - the ability to understand the technical functions of the municipality, or part of the municipal operations.

A treasurer in a small municipality will have fewer staff to supervise and will be doing most, or all, of the financial work himself. Up-to-date technical, or professional, skills will be very important. They would be less important in a very large treasury function where the technical work is performed by staff below the department head; the emphasis then would be much more on management skills.

Management or Supervisory Skills - the ability to plan, organize, direct, and control work and resources using leadership styles and techniques consistent with the goals and climate of the municipality.

The more responsibility and authority a job has, the greater the degree of management skill required. If you are hiring someone to supervise, say, three staff, you would want him or her to have some understanding of handling people, but prior supervisory experience is probably not necessary. A department head in a large municipality, on the other hand, will have to have had a lot of experience in organizing people and work, adapting new management techniques, setting and meeting objectives, and so on.

Communicative Ability - the ability to express one's self clearly and precisely in both speaking and writing, and to understand and respond to both written and oral communications.

It is important to communicate well in all management jobs, of course. The emphasis may vary -- it may be on reading and writing skills where there is a large volume of reports and correspondence, on oral skills where large numbers of staff are supervised or where the work involves persuading people, addressing groups, working on teams and committees.

Mental Energy - the ability to solve problems and situations, to understand and adapt new techniques and procedures, and the willingness to try new things.

Although the actual description of a job may not have changed for years, you may be looking for quite a different style of individual to fill it. You may want someone who will change things or, on the other hand, someone who will stabilize what is already there. You should deliberately choose the type you want, rather than let the personality "happen" to your organization. A person with a high degree of mental energy, an innovator, a risk taker, a changer, the "new blood" type will normally have changed jobs and taken on more responsibility with each one, will probably have a higher level of education and have taken more developmental courses, and will likely be a contributor to associations and community groups.

Political Awareness - an understanding of the political system and of one's role within the decision-making process, and the flexibility to adjust to and administer decisions made by councils.

Knowing when and how to introduce a problem, a program or an issue is a part of all municipal management jobs, but a crucial part of some. If it is crucial, you will be looking for a person who has demonstrated the ability to work successfully under the direction of different councils, who has been able to introduce change, who can work well but uncompromisingly with special interest groups, and one who is aware of the respective roles of council and staff in municipal issues.<sup>1</sup>

Different levels of ability in each of these five areas will depend on the type of education, training and experience the person has. If, for example, the job demands the ability to formulate and present policy recommendations to a committee of council, the person "must have"

- highly developed speaking skills, probably gained from an above average education, from public speaking experience, and from working closely with teams and committees;
- political awareness gained through working closely with council, and it would be "nice to have" experience working with councils in more than one municipality;
- mental energy to present recommendations that will achieve solutions to problems and to consider using new techniques, probably gained by those who have a high level of education, have taken some developmental courses, are involved in associations and groups, and have taken on new responsibilities by changing jobs a few times.

Considering the person you are looking for in this way, or any way that involves thinking about what the job will demand, will probably round off the corners of that square peg that shows up so often in recruiting.

<sup>1</sup>A full discussion of these five elements of local-government management is found in Discussion Paper #5: Education/Training/Development of the Managers for Local Government Study. This and other papers from the Study are available at \$0.50 per copy, prepaid, from the Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1W8.

### Be Realistic

Most of this bulletin has discussed the qualities that should be present, in varying degrees, in management staff. These qualities are rarely all fully developed in any manager or supervisor and it would be a mistake for you to look for that. You should look for the best fit -- you should try to meet the most demanding part of the job by hiring someone who, it seems, has some ability or skill in that area in particular. (Your ad can stress that, too.) You may have to compromise in areas that are of secondary importance.

You should not be too unrealistic or demanding in filling other jobs either. The job of a committee secretary at \$11,000 a year needs certain skills -- identify those skills and try to find someone with them, but don't try to "overfill" the job with someone with, say, five years of municipal experience and a Master's degree. Again, it's a matter of best fit.

### A Word of Caution About the Status Quo

It would be nice to think that you don't have to go through all this analysis because you are simply replacing someone who has resigned or retired. It would also be dangerous.

To bring back the analogy, you would not think of automatically replacing your ten-year-old Pontiac with this year's equivalent model. Just as your needs and the ways of meeting them change, so do the needs of the municipality change.

Do you really want a clerk-treasurer just like good old Charlie? Or should you re-examine that whole function and the role it has to play and the type of personality that would be most effective in the present situation? Do you really want to replace the accounts clerk, or should you really be thinking about up-grading the function and hiring a junior accountant?

Perhaps you shouldn't replace the person at all. The capabilities of the rest of the staff may have risen over time and they may be quite able, and willing, to "take up the slack". Maybe workload has diminished, too, so that the position is no longer justified. Too many people can be as inefficient as too few.

Summary

You may be in a municipality that has no difficulty at all hiring staff -- maybe the city hall is so new and beautiful that everyone wants to work there, or perhaps your municipality has a terrific C.A.O. and is THE place for young people to learn the municipal ropes. Congratulations!

But, on the other hand, even the most popular municipality has to have some basis for making sure the right people are hired. The job forms that basis. So Rule #1 is

## KNOW THE JOB YOU'RE FILLING

The "square peg in the round hole" situation causes everyone grief. That's why recruiting is such an important process. A lot of the risk can be removed if you decide what skills and abilities the job needs and the experiences and education that would be most likely to produce them in a person. You will be far less likely to be sidetracked by the "nice guy" or dazzled by the bright, young enthusiasts. You will be more likely to make the best fit. Rule #2, then;

## KNOW WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.

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